



FEMA

KPRC Weatherman Builds Above Hurricane Ike Storm Surge

Galveston, TX—"Build high and build strong. Build back better and smarter." That's the advice from Frank Billingsley, chief meteorologist for KPRC-TV, to survivors of Hurricane Ike and to his thousands of viewers in Galveston and Houston and elsewhere along the Texas Gulf Coast.

"I can't control the weather, but I can be there to warn people when their lives or property are in danger, and that's what makes my job worth it to me," Billingsley said. "I feel like I have a chance to give back to the world."

Before Hurricane Ike came ashore in Galveston at 2:10 a.m. on Saturday, September 13, 2008, KPRC had provided 24/7 coverage for more than a week. During much of that time, Billingsley was on the air every half hour for 8- to 10-minute segments. From Friday to Saturday noon, he went 24 hours straight, closed his eyes for two hours, and then continued until midnight.

A Houston weatherman since 1982, Billingsley is fiercely dedicated to keeping his viewers safe. "This is what Frank does," reported writer and real estate agent Alice Melott in the 2008 Recovery issue of *The Islander Magazine*. "The way he provided...a true service to the people of Galveston may well be remembered as one of the most humane acts of journalism most of us have ever seen."

During the long hours that Billingsley was reporting on the storm—on the air, in the air, on the phone, in the street—he knew his own Galveston Island house was at risk. At the peak of the storm, flood water surged into his neighborhood from the bay.

After the storm, officials blocked re-entry to the island for ten days for safety reasons. It was 2½ days before Billingsley knew that 30 inches of water surged into his lower-level garage, but otherwise left his house largely unaffected.

In the meantime, rumors and fears began to abound among displaced residents frantic to learn what was happening with their homes and their futures. Billingsley stepped into the information void, Melott said.

"Once he was cleared to fly there, Frank not only spent four hours reporting from over the west end, he did so with residents on the phone who were guiding him through their neighborhoods and narrating as he flew in for the close-ups," Melott wrote.

"Over a thousand requests came into the station that afternoon, and Frank was able to visit with about 40 property owners," Melott continued. "As they saw their homes for the first time, each owner choked with emotion. Some homes were in remarkably good shape; a few were flattened. It was real reality TV, and it was riveting."

Billingsley spent days walking through the devastation on Bolivar Peninsula and on Galveston's east and west ends, reporting what he saw to anxious evacuees.



Galveston County,
Texas



Quick Facts

Sector:

Private

Cost:

Amount Not Available

Primary Activity/Project:

Elevation, Structural

Primary Funding:

Homeowner